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## OUTSIDE LONDON.

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THERE was something dark on the grass under an elm in the field by the barn. It rose and fell; and we saw that it was a wing—a single black wing, striking the ground instead of the air; indeed, it seemed to come out of the earth itself, the body of the bird being hidden by the grass. This black wing flapped and flapped, but could not lift itself—a single wing of course could not fly. A rook had dropped out of the elm and was lying helpless at the foot of the tree—it is a favourite tree with rooks; they build in it, and at that moment there were twenty or more perched aloft, cawing and conversing comfortably, without the least thought of their dying comrade. Not one of all the number descended to see what was the matter, nor even fluttered half-way down. This elm is their clubhouse, where they meet every afternoon as the sun gets low to discuss the scandals of the day, before retiring to roost in the avenues and tree-groups of the park adjacent. While we looked, a peacock came round the corner of the barn; he had caught sight of the flapping wing, and approached with long deliberate steps and outstretched neck. 'What's this? What's this?' he inquired in bird-language. 'My friends, see here!' Gravely, and step by step, he came nearer and nearer, slowly, and not without some fear, till curiosity had brought him within a yard. In a moment or two a peahen followed and also stretched out her neck—the two long necks pointing at the black flapping wing. A second peacock and peahen approached, and the four great birds stretched out their necks towards the dying rook—a 'crownier's quest' upon the unfortunate creature.

If any one had been at hand to sketch it, the scene would have been very grotesque, and not without a ludicrous sadness. There was the tall elm tinted with yellow, the black rooks high

above flying in and out, yellow leaves twirling down, the blue peacocks with their crests, the red barn behind, the golden sun afar shining low through the trees of the park, the brown autumn sward, a gray horse, orange maple bushes. There was the quiet tone of the coming evening—the early evening of October—such an evening as the rook had seen many a time from the tops of the trees. A man dies, and the crowd goes on passing under the window along the street without a thought. The rook died, and his friends, who had that day been with him in the oaks feasting on acorns, who had been with him in the fresh-turned furrows, born perhaps in the same nest, utterly forgot him before he was dead. With a great common caw—a common shout—they suddenly left the tree in a bevy and flew towards the park. The peacocks having brought in their verdict, departed, and the dead bird was left alone.

In falling out of the elm, the rook had alighted partly on his side and partly on his back, so that he could only flutter one wing, the other being held down by his own weight. He had probably died from picking up poisoned grain somewhere, or from a parasite. The weather had been open, and he could not have been starved. At a distance, the rook's plumage appears black; but close at hand it will be found a fine blue-black, glossy, and handsome.

These peacocks are the best 'rain-makers' in the place; whenever they cry much, it is sure to rain; and if they persist day after day, the rain is equally continuous. From the wall by the barn, or the elm-branch above them, 'Pa-ong, pa-ong' resounds like the wail of a gigantic cat, and is audible half a mile or more. In the summer, I found one of them, a peacock in the full brilliance of his colours, on a rail in the hedge under a spreading maple bush. His rich-hued neck, the bright light and shadow, the tall green meadow grass, brought together the finest colours. It is curious that a bird so distinctly foreign, plumed for the Asiatic sun, should fit so well with English meads. His

splendid neck immediately pleases, pleases the first time it is seen, and on the fiftieth occasion. I see these every day, and always stop to look at them ; the colour excites the sense of beauty in the eye, and the shape satisfies the idea of form. The undulating curve of the neck is at once approved by the intuitive judgment of the mind, and it is a pleasure to the mind to reiterate that judgment frequently. It needs no teaching to see its beauty—the feeling comes of itself.

How different with the turkey-cock which struts round the same barn ! A fine big bird he is, no doubt ; but there is no intrinsic beauty about him ; on the contrary, there is something fantastic in his style and plumage. He has a way of drooping his wings as if they were armour-plates to shield him from a shot. The ornaments upon his head and beak are in the most awkward position. He was put together in a dream, of uneven and odd pieces that live and move, but do not fit. Ponderously gawky, he steps as if the world was his, like a 'motley' crowned in sport. He is good eating, but he is not beautiful. After the eye has been accustomed to him for some time—after you have fed him every day and come to take an interest in him—after you have seen a hundred turkey-cocks, then he may become passable, or, if you have the fancier's taste, exquisite. Education is requisite first ; you do not fall in love at first sight. The same applies to fancy-pigeons, and indeed many pet animals, as pugs, which come in time to be animated with a soul in some people's eyes. Compare a pug with a greyhound straining at the leash. Instantly he is slipped, he is gone as a wave let loose. His flexible back bends and undulates, arches and unarches, rises and falls as a wave rises and rolls on. His pliant ribs open ; his whole frame 'gives' and stretches, and closing again in a curve, springs forward. Movement is as easy to him as to the wave, which melting, is re-moulded, and sways onward. The curve of the greyhound is not only the line of beauty, but a line which suggests motion ; and it is the idea of motion, I think, which so strongly appeals to the mind.

We are often scornfully treated as a nation by people who write about art, because they say we have no taste ; we cannot make art jugs for the mantelpiece, crockery for the bracket, screens for the fire ; we cannot even decorate the wall of a room as it should be done. If these are the standards by which a sense of art is to be tried, their scorn is to a certain degree just. But suppose we try another standard. Let us put aside the altogether false opinion that art consists alone in something actually made, or painted, or decorated, in carvings, colourings, touches of brush or chisel. Let us look at our lives. I mean to say that there is no nation so thoroughly and earnestly artistic as the English in their lives, their joys, their thoughts, their hopes. Who loves nature like an Englishman ? Do Italians care for their pale skies ? I never heard so. We go all over the world in search of beauty—to the keen north, to the cape whence the midnight sun is visible, to the extreme south, to the interior of Africa, gazing on the vast expanse of Tanganyika or

the marvellous falls of the Zambezi. We admire the temples and tombs and palaces of India ; we speak of the Alhambra of Spain almost in whispers, so deep is our reverent admiration ; we visit the Parthenon. There is not a picture nor a statue in Europe we have not sought. We climb the mountains for their views and the sense of grandeur they inspire ; we roam over the wide ocean to the coral islands of the far Pacific ; we go deep into the woods of the West ; and we stand dreamily under the Pyramids of the East. What part is there of the English year which has not been sung by the poets ? all of whom are full of its loveliness ; and our greatest of all, Shakespeare, carries, as it were, armfuls of violets, and scatters roses and golden wheat across his pages, which are simply fields written with human life.

This is art indeed—art in the mind and soul, infinitely deeper, surely, than the construction of crockery, jugs for the mantelpiece, dados, or even of paintings. The lover of nature has the highest art in his soul. So, I think, the bluff English farmer who takes such pride and delight in his dogs and horses, is a much greater man of art than any Frenchman preparing with cynical dexterity of hand some coloured presentation of flashy beauty for the *salon*. The English girl who loves her horse—and English girls do love their horses most intensely—is infinitely more artistic in that fact than the cleverest painter on enamel. They who love nature are the real artists ; the 'artists' are copyists. St John the naturalist, when exploring the recesses of the Highlands, relates how he frequently came in contact with men living in the rude Highland way—forty years since, no education then—whom at first you would suppose to be morose, unobservant, almost stupid. But when they found out that their visitor would stay for hours gazing in admiration at their glens and mountains, their demeanour changed. Then the truth appeared : they were fonder than he was himself of the beauties of their hills and lakes ; they could see the art *there*, though perhaps they had never seen a picture in their lives, certainly not any blue and white crockery. The Frenchman flings his fingers dexterously over the canvas, but he has never had that in his heart which the rude Highlander had.

The path across the arable field was covered with a design of birds' feet. The reversed broad arrow of the fore-claws, and the straight line of the hinder claw, trailed all over it in curving lines. In the dry dust, their feet were marked as clearly as a seal on wax—their trails wound this way and that, and crossed as their quick eyes had led them to turn to find something. For fifty or sixty yards the path was worked with an inextricable design ; it was a pity to step on it and blot out the traces of those little feet. Their hearts so happy, their eyes so observant, the earth so bountiful to them with its supply of food, and the late warmth of the autumn sun lighting up their life. They know and feel the different loneliness of the seasons as much as we do. Every one must have noticed their joyousness in spring ; they are quiet, but so very, very busy in the height of summer ; as autumn comes on they obviously delight in the occasional hours of warmth. The marks of their little feet are

almost sacred—a joyous life has been there—do not obliterate it. It is so delightful to know that something is happy.

The hawthorn hedge that glints down the slope is more coloured than the hedges in the sheltered plain. Yonder, a low bush on the brow is a deep crimson; the hedge as it descends varies from brown to yellow, dotted with red haws, and by the gateway has another spot of crimson. The lime-trees turn yellow from top to bottom, all the leaves together; the elms by one or two branches at a time. A lime-tree thus entirely coloured stands side by side with an elm, their boughs intermingling; the elm is green except a line at the outer extremity of its branches. A red light as of fire plays in the beeches, so deep is their orange tint in which the sunlight is caught. An oak is dotted with buff, while yet the main body of the foliage is untouched. With these tints and sunlight, nature gives us so much more than the tree gives. A tree is nothing but a tree in itself; but with light and shadow, green leaves moving, a bird singing, another moving to and fro—in autumn with colour—the boughs are filled with imagination. There then seems so much more than the mere tree; the timber of the trunk, the mere sticks of the branches, the wooden framework is animated with a life. High above, a lark sings, not for so long as in spring—the October song is shorter—but still he sings. If you love colour, plant maple; maple bushes colour a whole hedge. Upon the bank of a pond, the brown oak-leaves which have fallen are reflected in the still deep water.

It is from the hedges that taste must be learned. A garden abuts on these fields, and being on slightly rising ground, the maple bushes, the brown and yellow and crimson hawthorn, the limes and elms, are all visible from it; yet it is surrounded by stiff straight iron railings, unconcealed even by the grasses, which are carefully cut down with the docks and nettles, that do their best, three or four times in the summer, to hide the blank iron. Within these iron railings stands a row of *arbor vitea*, upright, and stiff likewise, and among them a few other evergreens; and that is all the shelter the lawn and flower-beds have from the east wind, blowing for miles over open country; or from the glowing sun of August. This garden belongs to a gentleman who would certainly spare no moderate expense to improve it, and yet there it remains, the blankest, barest, most miserable-looking square of ground the eye can find; the only piece of ground from which the eye turns away; for even the potato-field close by, the common potato-field, had its colour in bright poppies, and there were partridges in it, and at the edges, fine growths of mallow and its mauve flowers. Wild parsley, still green in the shelter of the hazel stoles, is there now on the bank, a thousand times sweeter to the eye than bare iron and cold evergreens. Along that hedge, the white bryony wound itself in the most beautiful manner, completely covering the upper part of the thick brambles, a robe thrown over the bushes; its deep cut leaves, its countless tendrils, its flowers, and presently the berries, giving pleasure every time one passed it. Indeed, you could not pass without stopping to look at it, and wondering if any one ever so skilful, even those sure-handed Florentines Mr

Ruskin thinks so much of, could ever draw that intertangled mass of lines. Nor could you easily draw the leaves and head of the great parsley—commonest of hedge-plants—the deep indented leaves, and the shadow by which to express them. There was work enough in that short piece of hedge by the potato-field for a good pencil every day the whole summer. And when done, you would not have been satisfied with it, but only have learned how complex and how thoughtful and far-reaching, Nature is in the simplest of things. But with a straight-edge or ruler, any one could draw the iron railings in half an hour, and a surveyor's pupil could make them look as well as Millais himself. Stupidity to stupidity, genius to genius; any hard fist can manage iron railings; a hedge is a task for the greatest.

Those, therefore, who really wish their gardens or grounds, or any place, beautiful, must get that greatest of geniuses, Nature, to help them, and give their artist freedom to paint to fancy, for it is Nature's imagination which delights us—as I tried to explain about the tree, the imagination, and not the fact of the timber and sticks. For these white bryony leaves and slender spirals and exquisitely defined flowers, are full of imagination, products of a sunny dream, and tinted so tastefully, that although they are green, and all about them is green too, yet the plant is quite distinct, and in no degree confused or lost in the mass of leaves under and by it. It stands out, and yet without violent contrast. All these beauties of form and colour surround the place, and try, as it were, to march in and take possession, but are shut out by straight iron railings. Wonderful it is that education should make folk tasteless! Such, certainly, seems to be the case in a great measure, and not in our own country only, for those who know Italy tell us that the fine old gardens there, dating back to the days of the Medici, are being despoiled of ilex and made formal and straight. Is all the world to be Versaillised?

Scarcely two hundred yards from these cold iron railings, which even nettles and docks would hide if they could, and thistles strive to conceal, but are not permitted, there is an old cottage by the roadside. The roof is of old tile, once red, now dull from weather; the walls some tone of yellow; the folk are poor. Against it there grows a vigorous plant of jessamine, a still finer rose, a vine covers the lean-to at one end, and tea-plant the corner of the wall; besides these, there is a yellow-flowering plant, the name of which I forget at the moment, also trained to the walls; and ivy. Altogether, six plants grow up the walls of the cottage; and over the wicket-gate there is a rude arch—a framework of tall sticks—from which droop thick bunches of hops. It is a very commonplace sort of cottage; nothing artistically picturesque about it, no effect of gable or timber-work; it stands by the roadside in the most commonplace way, and yet it pleases. They have called in Nature, that great genius, and let the artist have his own way. In Italy, the art-country, they cut down the ilex trees, and get the surveyor's pupil with straight-edge and ruler to put it right and square for them. Our over-educated and well-to-do people set iron railings round about their blank pleasure-grounds, which

the potato-field laughs at in bright poppies ; and actually one who has some fine park-grounds has lifted up on high a mast and weather-vane ! a thing useful on the sea-board at coastguard stations for signalling, but oh ! how repellent and straight and stupid among clumps of graceful elms !

### A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

#### CHAPTER III.

As it turned out, Frances had not the courage. Mr Waring strolled into the loggia shortly after Miss Durant had left her. He smiled when he heard of her visit, and asked what news she had brought. Tasie was the recognised channel for news, and seldom appeared without leaving some little story behind her.

'I don't think she had any news to-day ; except that there had been a great many at the Sunday school last Sunday. Fancy, papa, twelve children ! She is quite excited about it.'

'That is a triumph,' said Mr Waring with a laugh. He stretched out his long limbs from the low basket-chair in which he had placed himself. He had relaxed a little altogether from the tension of the morning, feeling himself secure and at his ease in his own house, where no one could intrude upon him or call up ghosts of the past. The air was beyond expression sweet and tranquillising, the sun going down in a mist of glory behind the endless peaks and ridges that stretched away towards the west, the sea lapping the shore with a soft cadence that was more imagined than heard on the heights of the Punto, but yet added another harmony to the scene. Near at hand, a faint wind rustled the long leaves of the palm-trees, and the pale olive woods lent a softness to the landscape, tempering its brightness. Such a scene fills up the weary mind, and has the blessed quality of arresting thought. It was good for the breathing too—or at least so this invalid thought—and he was more amiable than usual, with no harshness in voice or temper to introduce a discord. 'I am glad she was pleased,' he said. 'Tasie is a good girl, though not perhaps so much of a girl as she thinks. Why she goes in for a Sunday school where none is wanted, I can't tell ; but anyhow I am glad she is pleased. Where did they come from, the twelve children ? Poor little beggars ! how sick of it they must have been.'

'A number of them belonged to that English family, papa'—

'I suppose they must all belong to English families,' he said calmly ; 'the natives are not such fools.'

'But, papa, I mean—the people we met—the people you knew.'

He made no reply for a few minutes, and then he said calmly : 'What an ass the man must be, not only to travel with children, but to send them to poor Tasie's Sunday school ! You must do me the justice, Fan, to acknowledge that I never attempted to treat you in that way.'

'No ; but, papa—perhaps the gentleman is a very religious man.'

'And you don't think I am ? Well, perhaps I laid myself open to such a retort.'

'O papa !' Frances cried, with tears starting to her eyes, 'you know I could not mean that.'

'If you take religion as meaning a life by rule, which is its true meaning, you were right enough, my dear. That is what I never could do. It might have been better for me if I had. It is always better for one to put one's self in harmony with received notions and the prejudices of society. Tasie would not have her Sunday school but for that. It is the right thing. I think you have a leaning towards the right thing, my little girl, yourself.'

'I don't like to be particular, papa, if that is what you mean.'

'Always keep to that,' her father said with a smile. And then he opened the book which he had been holding all this time in his hand. Such a thing had happened, when Frances was in high spirits and very courageous, as that she had pursued him even into his book ; but it was a very rare exercise of valour, and to-day she shrank from it. If she only had the courage ; but she had not the courage. She had given up her drawing, for the sun no longer shone on the group of palms. She had no book, and indeed at any time was not much given to reading, except when a happy chance threw a novel into her hands. She watched the sun go down by imperceptible degrees, yet not slowly, behind the mountains. When he had quite disappeared, the landscape changed too ; the air, as the Italians say, grew brown ; a little momentary chill breathed out of the sky. It is always depressing to a solitary watcher when this change takes place.

Frances was not apt to be depressed, but for the moment she felt lonely and dull, and a great sense of monotony took hold upon her. It was like this every night ; it would be like this, so far as she knew, every night to come, until perhaps she grew old, like Tasie, without becoming aware that she had ceased to be a girl. It was not a cheering prospect. And when there is any darkness or mystery surrounding one's life, these are just the circumstances to quicken curiosity, and turn it into something graver, into an anxious desire to know. Frances did not know positively that there was a mystery. She had no reason to think there was, she said to herself. Her father preferred to live easily on the Riviera, instead of living in a way that would trouble him at home. Perhaps the gentleman they had met was a bore, and that was why Mr Waring avoided all mention of him. He frequently thought people were bores, with whom Frances was very well satisfied. Why should she think any more of it ? Oh, how she wished she had the courage to ask plainly and boldly : Who are we ? Where do we come from ? Have we any friends ? But she had not the courage. She looked towards him, and trembled, imagining within herself what would be the consequence if she interrupted his reading, plucked him out of the quietude of the hour and of his book, and demanded an explanation—when very likely there was no explanation ! when, in all probability, everything was quite simple, if she only knew.

The evening passed as evenings generally did pass in the Palazzo. Mr Waring talked a little at dinner quite pleasantly, and smoked a cigarette in the loggia afterwards in great good-humour,

telling Frances various little stories of people he had known. This was a sign of high satisfaction on his part, and very agreeable to her, and no doubt he was entirely unaware of the perplexity in her mind and the questions she was so desirous of asking. The air was peculiarly soft that evening, and he sat in the loggia till the young moon set, with an overcoat on his shoulders and a rug on his knees, sometimes talking, sometimes silent—in either way a very agreeable companion. Frances had never been cooped up in streets, or exposed to the chill of an English spring; so she had not that keen sense of contrast which doubles the enjoyment of a heavenly evening in such a heavenly locality. It was all quite natural, common, and everyday to her; but no one could be indifferent to the sheen of the young moon, to the soft circling of the darkness, and the reflections on the sea. It was all very lovely, and yet there was something wanting. What was wanting? She thought it was knowledge, acquaintance with her own position, and relief from this strange bewildering sensation of being cut off from the race altogether, which had risen within her mind so quickly and with so little cause.

But many beside Frances have felt the wistful call for happiness more complete, which comes in the soft darkening of a summer night; and probably it was not explanation, but something else, more common to human nature, that she wanted. The voices of the peaceful people outside, the old men and women who came out to sit on the benches upon the Punto, or on the stone seat under the wall of the Palazzo, and compare their experiences, and enjoy the cool of the evening, sounded pleasantly from below. There was a softened din of children playing, and now and then a sudden rush of voices, when the young men who were strolling about got excited in conversation, and stopped short in their walk for the delivery of some sentence more emphatic than the rest; and the mothers chattered over their babies, cooing and laughing. The babies should have been in bed, Frances said to herself, half laughing half crying, in a sort of tender anger with them all for being so familiar and so much at home. They were entirely at home where they were; they knew everybody, and were known from father to son, and from mother to daughter, all about them. They did not call a distant and unknown country by that sweet name, nor was there one among them who had any doubt as to where he or she was born. This thought made Frances sigh, and then made her smile. After all, if that was all! And then she saw that Domenico had brought the lamp into the *salone*, and that it was time to go indoors.

Next morning, she went out between the early coffee and the mid-day breakfast, to do some little household business, on which, in consideration that she was English, and not bound by the laws that are so hard and fast with Italian girls, Mariuccia consented to let her go alone. It was very seldom that Mr Waring went out, or indeed was visible at that hour, the expedition of the former day being very exceptional. Frances went down to the shop to do her little commissions for Mariuccia. She even investigated the Savona pots of which Tasie had spoken. In her circum-

stances, it was scarcely possible not to be more or less of a collector. There is nobody in these regions who does not go about with eyes open to anything there may be to 'pick up.' And after this she walked back through the olive woods, by those distracting little terraces which lead the stranger so constantly out of his way, but are quite simple to those who are to the manner born—until she reached once more the broad piece of unshadowed road which leads up to the old town. At the spot at which she and her father had met the English family yesterday, she made a momentary pause, recalling all the circumstances of the meeting, and what the stranger had said: 'A fellow that stuck by you all through.' All through what? she asked herself. As she paused to make this little question, to which there was no response, she heard a sound of voices coming from the upper side of the wood, where the slopes rose high into more and more olive gardens. 'Don't hurry along so; I'm coming,' some one said. Frances looked up, and her heart jumped into her mouth as she perceived that it was about to meet on the same spot.

The father was in advance this time, and he was hurrying down, she thought, with the intention of addressing her. What should she do? She knew very well what her father would have wished her to do; but probably for that very reason a contradictory impulse arose in her. Without doubt, she wanted to know what this man knew and could tell her. Not that she would ask him anything, she was too proud for that. To betray that she was not acquainted with her father's affairs, that she had to go to a stranger for information, was a thing of which she was incapable. But if he wished to speak to her—to send, perhaps, some message to her father? Frances quieted her conscience in this way. She was very anxious, excited by the sense that there was something to find out; and if it was anything her father would not approve, why, then, she could shut it up in her own breast and never let him know it to trouble him. And it was right at her age that she should know. All these sophistries hurried through her mind more rapidly than lightning during the moment in which she paused hesitating, and gave the large Englishman, overwhelmed with the heat, and hurrying down the steep path with his white umbrella over his head, time to make up to her. He was rather out of breath, for though he had been coming down hill, and not going up, the way was steep.

'Miss Waring, Miss Waring,' he cried as he approached, 'how is your father? I want to ask for your father,' taking off his straw hat and exposing his flushed countenance under the shadow of the green-lined umbrella, which enhanced all its ruddy tints; then, as he came within reach of her, he added hastily: 'I am so glad I have met you. How is he? for he did not give me any address.'

'Papa is quite well, thank you,' said Frances with the habitual response of a child.

'Quite well? Oh, that is a great deal more than I expected to hear. He was not quite well yesterday, I am sure. He is dreadfully changed. It was a sort of guesswork my recognising him

at all. He used to be such a powerful-made man. Is it pulmonary? I suspect it must be something of the kind, he has so wasted away.'

'Pulmonary? Indeed, I don't know. He has a little asthma sometimes. And of course he is very thin,' said Frances; 'but that does not mean anything; he is quite well.'

The stranger shook his head. He had taken the opportunity to wipe it with a large white handkerchief, and had made his bald forehead look redder than ever. 'I shouldn't like to alarm you,' he said—'I wouldn't, for all the world: but I hope you have trustworthy advice? These Italian doctors, they are not much to be trusted. You should get a real good English doctor to come and have a look at him.'

'O indeed, it is only asthma; he is well enough, quite well, not anything the matter with him,' Frances protested. The large stranger stood and smiled compassionately upon her, still shaking his head.

'Mary,' he said; 'here, my dear!—This is Miss Waring. She says her father is quite well, poor thing. I am telling her I am so very glad we have met her, for Waring did not leave me any address.'

'How do you do, my dear?' said the stout lady—not much less red than her husband—who had also hurried down the steep path to meet Frances. 'And your father is quite well? I am so glad. We thought him looking rather—thin: not so strong as he used to look.'

'But then,' added her husband, 'it is such a long time since we have seen him, and he never was very stout. I hope, if you will pardon me for asking, that things have been smoothed down between him and the rest of the family? When I say "smoothed down," I mean set on a better footing—more friendly, more harmonious. I am very glad I have seen you, to inquire privately—for one never knows how far to go with a man of his—well—peculiar temper.'

'Don't say that, George.—You must not think, my dear, that Mr. Mannering means anything that is not quite nice and amiable and respectful to your papa. It is only out of kindness that he asks. Your poor papa has been much tried. I am sure he has always had my sympathy, and my husband's too. Mr. Mannering only means that he hopes things are more comfortable between your father and— Which is so much to be desired for everybody's sake.'

The poor girl stood and stared at them with large, round, widely opening eyes, with the wondering stare of a child. There had been a little half-mischiefous, half-anxious longing in her mind to find out what these strangers knew; but now she came to herself suddenly, and felt as a traveller feels who all at once pulls himself up on the edge of a precipice. What was this pitfall which she had nearly stumbled into, this rent from the past, which was so great and so complete that she had never heard of it, never guessed it? Fright seized upon her, and dismay, and, what probably stood her in more stead for the moment, a stinging sensation of wounded pride, which brought the colour burning to her cheeks. Must she let these people find out that she knew nothing, at her age—that her father had never confided in her

at all—that she could not even form an idea what they were talking about? She had pleased herself with the possibility of some little easy discovery, of finding out, perhaps, something about the cousins, whom it seemed certain, according to Tatie, every one must possess, whether they were aware of it or not—some little revelation of origin and connections such as could do nobody any harm. But when she woke up suddenly to find herself as it were upon the edge of a chasm which had split her father's life in two, the young creature trembled. She was frightened beyond measure by this unexpected contingency; she dared not listen to another word.

'Oh!' she said with a quiver in her voice, 'I am afraid I have no time to stop and talk. Papa will be waiting for his breakfast. I will tell him you—asked for him.'

'Give him our love,' said the lady.—'Indeed, George, she is quite right; we must hurry too, or we shall be too late for the *table-d'hôte*.'

'But I have not got the address,' said the husband. Frances made a little courtesy, as she had been taught, and waved her hand as she hurried away. He thought that she had not understood him. 'Where do you live?' he called after her as she hastened along. She pointed towards the height of the little town, and alarmed for she knew not what, lest he should follow her—lest he should call something after her which she ought not to hear, fled along towards the steep ascent. She could hear the voices behind her slightly elevated talking to each other, and then the sound of the children rattling down the stony course of the higher road, and the quick question and answer as they rejoined their parents. Then gradually everything relapsed into silence as the party disappeared. When she heard the voices no longer, Frances began to regret that she had been so hasty. She paused for a moment, and looked back; but already the family were almost out of sight, the solid figures which led the procession indistinguishable from the little ones who struggled behind. Whether it might have been well or ill to take advantage of the chance, it was now over. She arrived at the Palazzo out of breath, and found Domenico at the door, looking out anxiously for her. 'The Signorina is late,' he said very gravely; 'the padrone has almost had to wait for his breakfast.' Domenico was quite original, and did not know that such a terrible possibility had threatened any illustrious personage before.

#### THE BURIED CITIES.

A HALO of romance surrounds the very names of Pompeii and Herculaneum, as we read the strange story of their melancholy fate; but when we visit those silent streets and stand in those empty theatres, the romance is translated into such vivid reality, that we seem to live in the life of that distant past, every detail of which is preserved, and brought visibly and tangibly before us. Nature smiles, unfaded and unchanged, in all her Southern loveliness; the purple waters of the Bay of Naples still kiss the vine-wreathed shore; still the burning mountain shoots its fire and smoke into the blue vault of heaven, as an awful reminder of the unseen forces smouldering

beneath it, ever ready to overwhelm the surrounding plain, and to repeat the story written on Pompeii and Herculaneum with a finger of fire.

The principal excavations have been made at Pompeii, which, being buried in ashes, was more easily disinterred than Herculaneum, upon which the full force of the crimson lava-stream flowed in its burning course, hardening rapidly to the consistency of marble, which had to be quarried before the city could be reached. Owing to the difficulty of the work, only a small part of the necessary excavation is completed, and great care has to be exercised, from the fact of another town having sprung up on the surface of the lava, and the consequent danger of undermining it. We walk through narrow passages tunnelled in the lava to the large theatre. The orchestra with its marble seats is perfect; the stage, too, is excavated; but the remaining parts are not yet quarried out of the enormous mass of lava, many yards in depth, under which they were buried. We pass through more lava-tunnels to an excavated square, containing houses and shops. The frescos of the so-called 'House of Argus' still retain their bright colouring; many of the marble pillars are calcined to lime. On the marble counter of a wineshop the green impressions of bronze coins found there still remain. At the side are a number of the earthen *amphore* used to contain the wine; but, as at Pompeii, most of the articles discovered in the houses have been necessarily removed to the Museum of Naples. The whole district surrounding Herculaneum is a mass of cooled lava, a black desolate region, whence lava is quarried for paving and building purposes. The very air is sulphurous, and tainted with Vesuvian smoke.

Very different is the beautiful scene from Pompeii, with the blue sea on one side and luxuriant vegetation on the other; in the distance, the shadowy violet cliffs of Capri and Ischia rising from the waves. We descend a sloping path to the silent city, which stands between two enormous embankments of ashes, like a very deep railway cutting, and enter by the great gateway, with arches and pillars in perfect preservation. Through a small arch at the side, intended for foot-passengers, we pass into the deserted streets; from the high narrow footway, we see the track of wheels on the paved street below; and the great stepping-stones are still there, as in days of old, when the Pompeian ladies and their attendant slaves stepped lightly from one to another, on their way to the baths, the theatres, or other diversions of that gay life, whose every detail lies crystallised for the benefit of succeeding ages. Everywhere stand the remains of sculptured fountains—at the street corners, in every house, in every square. The whole city must have been musical with the ripple of falling waters, in those long-past summer noontides and moonlit nights when Pompeii was in its zenith of pomp and pride.

A number of converging streets lead into the forum—the centre of the city's life. Here are the perfect remains of beautiful temples, with their marble columns and sculptured altars, on which inscriptions to Juno, Venus, &c. may still be read. On some are delicate carvings representing sacrifice, in high

relief, every detail of leaf, flower, and figure clear and sharp as when first chiselled. On the inner walls are nymphs and goddesses, classical fables and legends in fresco. We go through the street of the soap-makers and visit the large soapworks, where the huge iron caldrons are still left, their intrinsic value not being sufficient to warrant removal. Another street is full of wineshops, with the large red jars still inserted in the marble counters. Then we pass the city bake-houses, whose ovens were found full of charred bread, now in the Naples Museum, the baker's name stamped upon each loaf. Close by are the splendid public baths, with every appliance for hot, cold, and vapour baths, the pipes and cisterns still remaining. We walk into the frigidarium, tepidarium, and other chambers, the floors of black and white marble, with raised marble seats round each room, walls and ceilings covered with appropriate sculpture and painting: Diana bathing in a forest stream; a group of water-nymphs disporting themselves by moonlight in a calm lake; the Sirens combing their golden hair on the neighbouring rocks, which still bear their name. How wonderfully the luxurious Pompeian life is brought to mind, as we stand here lost in the dreams which the baths inspire, of the youth, fashion, and beauty of two thousand years ago.

One quarter of the city contains only the private houses of the rich; the bust of the owner in each atrium or entrance hall, with the name carved below, informs us to whom every house belonged. All are built in the same style, with the atrium, impluvium, and triclinium, after the usual Roman fashion; slender marble pillars, which once supported the roofs, now vanished, or remaining only in the shape of crumbled fragments, fallen in upon the marble floors below. The remains of a fountain are generally found in the central basin of the impluvium, that cool retreat from the fierce Italian sun, once green with leafy plants and musical with murmuring waters, where the gay Pompeians took their siesta in the shade, or lounged through the hot noonday hours. The sleeping-rooms surround the three large divisions of the houses, all being built on the ground-floor, with no upper story. On every threshold is 'Ave' or 'Cave canem' (Beware the dog) in black mosaic on the white marble. The inner walls are painted with wreaths of flowers and fruit, or dancing-girls in transparent draperies strewing roses. All the frescos show the soft and pleasure-loving Pompeian temperament. Artistic grace and beauty are everywhere present; but neither force nor fervour can be seen; life seems to have been regarded as a long game of play, or one continuous flower-wreathed festival.

We search for the houses of Sallust and Cloaculus, and that of the Tragic Poet, so called from the frescos on the wall representing scenes from the Greek tragedies, and giving a clue to the life of the owner; but the number of houses makes a detailed examination of each one an impossibility. At the corner of a street leading into the forum stands the exchange. On the walls, the names of certain magistrates and a request to vote for them, implies that the city at the time of its destruction was on the eve of a general election. On another wall beyond, some more red letters tell us that on the kalends of May

some lions will fight in the amphitheatre with a certain gladiator of great renown. These little touches here and there from the distant past enable us more than anything else to realise the actual life of Pompeii.

We ascend a flight of marble steps to the Tragic Theatre ; stage, orchestra, auditorium, and even ticket-offices are in perfect preservation—all open to the sky, after the ancient fashion. We think of the tragedies represented on this very stage, of the hushed and eager faces rising tier above tier to the blue sky, of the jewelled dames and rose-crowned maidens whose tears did homage to the tragedian's art ; the strains of music from the long-silent orchestra ; and then, all in a moment, we see the ashen cloud descending upon the crowd, who rush wildly from the scene, some few to escape in safety, others to rush into the blue sea in their madness, and upon the rest, the pall of darkness falling, not to be lifted for two thousand years. Close at hand is the smaller Comic Theatre, where jest and epigram played their part in holding up the follies of the day to ridicule ; where wit sparkled merrily, and satire scathed all that it touched ; where the mirth and laughter of the gay spectators were suddenly checked into eternal silence by that advancing cloud of doom. The place seems thronged with ghosts and memories ; nowhere else does the melancholy silence of Pompeii strike us so forcibly as in this theatre, once built to foster fun and merriment.

Hence we go to the Street of Tombs, on rising ground, which commands exquisite views of the blue waters and the verdant shore. The inscriptions on the monuments are clear enough to be easily read. On one stately white marble tomb, the words (in Latin), 'To Mamia, a priestess, by order of the Triumvirs,' look almost new, so clearly are they chiselled on the tablet. A marble seat stands here, once placed for the accommodation of those who used to visit the tomb. We rest for a moment, and think of that long-dead Mamia, with white vestal robes and dark flowing hair, and, perchance, the rapt face which Raphael has given to his Cumean sibyl, and wonder what manner of woman she was, to win such honour from the chief magistrates of Pompeii. Did she 'prophecy smooth things,' and so gain the approval of the votaries of pleasure ? Or did her personal austerities try to atone for those other lives, so soft and luxurious, and thus win from them in death some tribute of pity and remorse, of which this stately tomb was the outward expression ?

Just opposite is a large building, supposed to have been the principal inn of Pompeii ; the stables, with remains of the stalls, are pointed out, though, strange to say, the skeletons of only two horses have yet been found. It is thought that the atmospheric disturbances were felt by animal instinct sooner than by human senses, and that this instinct led the horses to escape from the city before the full force of the catastrophe made itself felt. The villa of Diomed stands near. His skeleton, the golden brooch still fastening the charred toga, was found on the threshold, a leathern purse of gold coins tightly clutched in one hand.

The ineffaceable records of Pompeii are enough to provide an inexhaustible fund of story and

song ; every tomb is rich in suggestions, every house is a compendium of the history of that past age, and the interest of the place increases with each fresh excavation. A third part of the city still remains to be discovered, including the Street of the Goldsmiths, where rich treasures of ancient art are supposed to be hidden. The perfect preservation in which most of the articles are found is due not only to the immense weight of ashes rendering the city air-tight, but also to the chemical properties of the sulphureous and mineral-charged cloud which rained down in tons upon the houses and streets.

Near the entrance gate is a small Museum, containing the skeletons found in the city—a mother and daughter clasped in each other's arms ; a sentinel found at his post ; a man evidently knocked down by the cloud of ashes ; and several others. Some of them have been injured in the process of excavation, in spite of the unparalleled care with which the digging and sifting are always done. When a skeleton is found, hot plaster of Paris is immediately poured on to it, so that, while preserving the skeleton intact, it gives us also, by filling up the impression or mould of the body that had lain there, the form and features of the living man, thus adding to the interest and reality of what we see. All lie in the same position in which they were found ; the rings still on the fingers.

The only regret we feel about this excavation of Pompeii is that it was impossible to leave there the countless articles of furniture, dress, and luxury which were found ; and therefore, to preserve them from pillage and destruction, as well as from exposure to the air, they were taken to the Naples Museum, which forms the needful sequel to a visit to Pompeii. There we see room after room full of furniture from Pompeian houses—beds, baths, chairs, and tables all of carved bronze ; bronze couches, with the charred leathern cushions on which the indolent Pompeians once lounged at their costly feasts ; every imaginable kitchen utensil, knives, forks, the handles formed of a tiny human figure in bronze ; exquisitely finished bottles of curious iridescent glass ; figures of the Lares and Penates ; vases, beakers, jugs, cups, and dishes of every size and shape ; the rare artistic skill displaying the superiority of work done by hand to the products of modern machinery. A large collection of surgical instruments greatly interested a celebrated physician who was one of our party, and who expressed unbounded surprise at the very slight difference between these relics of the infancy of medical science and the instruments in use at the present day. Some large cases of dentists' tools caught our eye also ; nor did we need to be told what they were, being only too well acquainted with similar instruments of torture. A great number of paint-boxes are displayed, which still contain the same bright soft colours which we see on the walls of Pompeii ; and case after case of jewels, some found in the houses, others evidently dropped in hurried flight from the burning city, or fallen from the necks and arms of the skeletons. Rings, bracelets, chains, tiaras, necklaces without end, of finely chased gold, set with gems, some of the jewels uninjured, and sparkling as brightly after the lapse of ages, as they did on the snowy neck of a Pompeian beauty two

thousand years ago ; others dropped from the setting, where the heat has melted the gold out of shape. Exquisite cameo rings and clasps, representing classical or mythological subjects. Often a winged Mercury, or a Psyche with the butterfly poised above her head, serves to remind us how art lives, though the artist dies.

On a lady's bronze toilet-table stand a glass jar half full of rouge, some pomade pots, and a litter of carved combs, bronze hairpins, curling-irons and tongs, surrounding the polished metal mirror which once reflected the face whose beauty the fair owner tried to heighten. Those combs and hairpins once fastened perfumed tresses ; white fingers once dallied with the unguents and essences which stand on the table, or dipped the puff into the rouge which glows still with its pristine colour, though the cheek which it tinted is dissolved in death. A silk hair-net looking fresh and new hangs on a bronze hook ; and a charred shawl, with the long woolen fringe left upon it, lies close beside it, perhaps hastily caught up and wrapped over the festal robes, in preparation for the hurried flight, for universal testimony agrees that the city was destroyed at the time when some great festival was being held.

These personal details of dress and ornament move us strangely, and bind us by strong links of sympathy and pity with the sufferers in a calamity which, to most of us, is too far off to supply that touch of nature 'which makes the whole world kin.' Here are the sandals which once bound the light feet of Pompeian girls as they moved in the dance, or fled from the fiery rain which turned their joy into mourning, their life into death. Here are the skull and arm of a girl found buried in a side-stream of lava, upon which the impression of her rounded, youthful figure still remains, though that graceful form has long been numbered with the dead. Perhaps she was on her way to the theatre, with one of those quaintly devised tickets in her hand which attract our attention in a neighbouring room —tiny ivory violins to designate the orchestra, ivory pigeons with outspread wings for the gallery, little tablets with red numerical figures for the reserved seats of the patricians. How suggestive they are of that past life of pleasure, with its amusements, its follies, and its sins, so similar to those of later times—a fact brought before us by the number of dice, many of them loaded, which were found in the houses, showing that the chicaneries of the gambler were well known in Pompeii.

In the room which contains the charred bread from the public ovens already mentioned, are some bronze dishes of fruit set out exactly in the order in which they were found—dates, figs, walnuts, nuts, and plums, burned perfectly black, but retaining their shape unmistakably. It looks as though the guests had fled from the table on which the dessert was set out. The contents of a pantry stand near—a jar half full of oil; a bottle of flour, partly used ; a string-net hanging up, full of eggs, looking like lumps of chalk or lime ; a piece of roasted meat, fallen from an oven. These things make a bridge over the gulf of Time which separates us from Pompeian life, no doubt vividly described in the thousands of

charred and undecipherable parchments, supposed to represent the state documents, literature and poetry, of the city—probably the contents of the public library, to which are added numerous papyrus rolls, found in the houses of the rich. Here, too, are large bales of drapery and clothing, all burned to a uniform blackness, and scarcely distinguishable as to colour and texture, though gold threads glittering here and there suggest robes of state or festive garments laid aside in chest and coffer, but reached by the devouring heat, if not by actual fire.

Pliny the Elder, who at the time of the destruction of the two cities was in command of the fleet at Misenum, on the opposite side of the Bay of Naples, watched the gradual darkening of the thick cloud over Vesuvius, and tells us that the smoke spread outward and upward until it resembled a gigantic pine-tree stretching across the heavens, while loud subterranean thunders were heard, and a fountain of fire dashed up into the sky. Then the great crimson lava-flood burst forth and rushed down the mountain side in a river of liquid fire, to bury Herculaneum ; and the clouds of ashes, cinders, and sparks poured down by tons on Pompeii, the waters of the bay leaping up to meet the hissing fire which fell into the waves, ingulfing many of the boats which were bearing fugitives away from the terrible scene. Pliny himself lost his life, from venturing in a boat too near to the flaming town. Earth, air, and water each had its share in this awful convulsion of the elements ; the thunder of the mountain mocked the thunder of the waves upon the shore. One moment the fiery stream lighted up the crimson lava-flood and the pale, terrified faces of those who fled shrieking from their doom ; another moment, and all was engulfed in pitchy darkness. Then the rain of fire and the choking ashes buried palace, and temple, and tomb, turning each and all into a living grave. When silence fell upon the scene, Pompeii with its revels and roses lay fathoms deep in a shroud of ashes, to sleep the sleep of death through the silent centuries, until eighteen hundred years were told, when the spell of mystery was broken, and as by an enchanter's wand, the secret of its past was laid bare, and the veil lifted upon the old life thus so suddenly arrested.

#### K N O W E C R O F T.

##### A CUMBERLAND IDYL.

###### L.

SOMEWHAT less than half-a-dozen miles from Carlisle lies a pretty but sleepy little village, which we shall call Linthwaite. Far removed from the march of progress, it reposes in a peaceful slumber, unbroken by the rattle and din of locomotives, and unmolested by the 'kettle o' steäm'-driven inventions, so dear to agriculturists of the modern style. Save that in summer and autumn, the whir of the new-fangled reaping-machine is heard in the meadows and cornfields, as it sweeps down broad swaths of hay and yellow corn—usurping the place of the sturdy scant-clad husbandman, wielding his keen-edged scythe, and the bands of Irishmen, each armed

with his trusty sickle, who formerly invaded the land at harvest-time—no sound is ever heard there that might not have broken the silence fifty years ago. Certainly, now and again, at times when there is going to be rain, as the old folks say in their weather wisdom, the distant sound of a railway engine's whistle may be heard borne on the wind, faint and weird as the plaintive piping of the plover overhead in his autumn flight; but then it is so intangible as to seem but a 'wandering voice' from a far-off country, with which the good folks of Linthwaite can have nothing in common.

The young people have most of them, to be sure, at one time or another ventured their necks and limbs in a railway train; but there are those among its older inhabitants who have never yet known, and probably never will enjoy, that dangerous luxury. The farmers, with their wives or daughters, betake themselves to Carlisle every Saturday to dispose of their farm produce and make their marketing; and at less frequent intervals the villagers make fitful visits to the same place with the latter object, and this constitutes their main personal intercourse with the outer world. For the rest, the weekly newspaper supplies them with all the information they require touching markets and crops, politics for the men, and fashions and gossip for the women; and so they live their uneventful lives.

A stone's-throw from the road that skirts the village green stands Knowecroft, an old-fashioned farmhouse, which has been the patrimony of one generation of Martindales after another, time out of mind. At the period of our story it is occupied by a widow, her son, and daughter. Her husband has been dead some years; but his place as head of the household is filled by his son, Joe Martindale, who has now reached the age of twenty-five; his sister Ruth being some seven years younger.

It was on a bright September morning that Mrs Martindale, still a buxom and active dame, trotted down the orchard and called to her son, who was superintending harvesting operations in an adjoining field: 'Joe, Joe!'

'Ay, ay, mother. What is it?'

'Come here; I want the.'

Obedient to her call, Joe made his appearance, ruddy and sunburnt, and mopping his brow as he came.

'Here's a letter fra' Ruth,' continued his mother. 'She says she's comin' back to-night, an' thoo has to meet her at Carel by the seven o'clock train. I divvint know what lasses are meade on nooadays! Dis she think we've nowt to do wid the horses than to gan' rakin' off to the toon wid them at this teyme, an' half the fields to cut yit?'

'Well, mother,' rejoined Joe, laughing, 'she must come back some time, and I don't know that she could come at a better. And we won't hinder work either, for I'll take old Blossom.

He's good enough for that yet, and I'll give him his time.'

'Wey, I daresay thoo'll be able to mannish wid him,' replied Mrs Martindale; 'and I'll be reet glad to git the lass back again, onyway.'

To explain which, we may mention that Miss Ruth had been away from home for a whole week, to officiate as bridesmaid at the wedding of a cousin in Westmorland; and her mother had so missed her winsome face, that, notwithstanding her apparent reluctance, she would have been glad to get her daughter back again at the price of a day's work of every horse about the place.

So in good time Joe, having harnessed Blossom to the dogcart, drove leisurely off to Carlisle. Joe, as we said, is five-and-twenty years old, and stands rather over five feet ten in his stockings; is straight as a poplar and lithé as a willow; slim in build, but wiry and muscular, as a Cumberland yeoman should be. In the saddle he rides like a fox-hunter; on foot, his gait approaches the martial, as, with square shoulders well thrown back and head erect, he 'looks the whole world in the face.' His head is covered with curly brown hair, cropped short; his face, untouched by razor, is adorned by whiskers and beard of a darker shade. The general expression of his face is suggestive of good-nature and merriment; but something in the set of his lips betokens firmness, and even doggedness of purpose.

A good farmer for his years, and fairly accomplished in all the sports and pastimes of the country-side, he is also possessed of a taste for literature, and has read more than most of his class. For this latter tendency he is probably indebted to the fact that his education was completed under the eye of his father's cousin, who was vicar of a parish in Westmorland, and eked out his scanty stipend there by taking Joe and one or two other lads to educate along with his own sons.

## II.

After an easy drive, Joe reached the station at Carlisle a few minutes before seven, and in due course the train arrived; but, to his disappointment, no Ruth came with it. On making inquiry, he found that this train did not stop at Tebay—a fact which his sister must have overlooked when making arrangements for his meeting her—and that she could not now reach Carlisle before half-past ten. So he drove back to the *Lion*, which was their usual quarters, and putting Blossom in charge of the hostler, he strolled out into the town. Walking up Lowther Street, he noticed that most of the people there were moving in the opposite direction, so he turned and joined them. He then found that they were bound for the theatre; and as he had nearly three hours to wait before his sister's train was due, he determined to drop in there and see

what was to be seen. The play was one of the usual melodramatic type, with a 'good murder' to begin with, a virtuous young man on whom suspicion falls, complications innumerable brought about by the machinations of a wicked uncle, heart-rending scenes between the hero and his devoted sweetheart, another murder, and a detective officer of superhuman sagacity, who clears everything up just at the right moment, bringing the whole to an orthodox conclusion, with 'virtue triumphant and villainy vanquished.'

Joe watched the whole of the first act with phlegmatic indifference, but not so the second. The scene of this was laid in a dairy, and the change in Joe's feelings was brought about by the entrance of the dairymaid Phœbe. Was there ever such a charming manipulator of butter seen outside of fairyland? She had not many words to speak, for she was only there as a foil to set off the heroine, resplendent in silks and lace, who had come to the dairy on the sly to meet the hero, the farmer's son.

But Phœbe, in her neat pink dress, with sleeves rolled up, displaying the plumpest of arms and the dimpiest of elbows, deftly patting the butter, and trotting about her work as though she had been brought up inside a dairy all her life, had all Joe's eyes, and he saw nothing of the thrilling love-scene that was being enacted by the resplendent lady and her suitor in the foreground.

The dairymaid was not tall, by any means; if Joe had had his arm round her waist, and she had been looking up into Joe's face, her chin might have been about the level of Joe's heart, and Joe was five feet ten, so you may guess her height from that. The chin in question was round, and had a most bewitching dimple; her lips were red and pouting. Her nose was just the least little bit 'tip-tilted'; but her eyes—oh! we can't describe her eyes, for they were large and brown and liquid; and they could be cold and repelling, or languishing and attractive, or merry and sparkling, just as fitted the mood in which the fair Phœbe might be when she looked at you. Furthermore, she was plump, but jimp in the waist withal—not of the jimpness engendered by corsets and such-like devices, but of nature; and the pink gown in which she was dressed was not too long to hide a pair of the smallest of feet and most delicately turned ankles that ever supported a daughter of Eve. And to crown all, she walked about her stage-dairy modestly as a nun, and apparently utterly unconscious of the lookers-on.

When she left the stage, Joe found time to examine his playbill to ascertain the name of this charming creature, whom he found to be therein described as—

'Phœbe, a dairymaid—MISS PHYLLIS MAY.'

All Joe's interest in the drama was now centred in the entrances and exits of Miss Phyllis May. He began to call her by that name to himself, dismissing 'Phœbe, a dairymaid,' as being a myth; and now and again he felt sure she was looking straight at him, when he blushed, and suddenly became very much interested in the doings of the other actors, until he gathered courage to steal another glance at the charming Phœbe.

Now, as Joe was not by nature a particularly bashful fellow, it may be fairly inferred from all this that he had fallen in love with the pretty actress. At anyrate, when the curtain fell, he had a very faint idea of what the play had all been about, and he had imprinted on his mental retina the picture of a bewitching sylph in a pink gown, which miniature, if not warranted to be indelible, promised to take some time to efface. On consulting his watch, he found that he had just time, by running all the way to the *Lion*, to get Blossom harnessed and reach the station soon enough to meet his sister's train. He could scarcely have done this, had it been up to time, but fortunately for him it was a few minutes late, and he was waiting on the platform when it arrived. Ruth was looking out for him; and he soon had her seated in the dogcart, well wrapped up in the shawls which her mother had provided to protect her from the night-air, and was driving homeward a good deal faster than he had come; for Blossom needed no reminder from the whip that there was a feed of corn and a cosy stable waiting for him at his journey's end.

After the first mutual inquiries about friends, Ruth had all the talk to herself, for Joe seemed too preoccupied to originate conversation; and as she was doing her best to open the way for telling him a most important secret, closely touching herself, she found his silence rather tantalising. She lapsed into silence herself for a short while, but that made things no better; so at last she drew a long breath and went straight to the point.

'Dick is coming on Saturday, Joe,' she began. 'He would have come to-day, only they are so busy; and it is so rough travelling on Saturdays, that aunt thought I had better not wait till then.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Joe, only half following what she said; and thereupon followed another interval of silence.

'Joe!' whispered Ruth at last, nestling closer to her brother and laying her head against his arm—'Joe! Dick wants me to marry him; and—and—I love him very much; and that is what is bringing him on Saturday, to talk to mother and you about it. You like him, Joe! I know you do!'

This roused Joe from his reverie, and slipping his arm round his sister's waist, he kissed her, and said: 'Do you want to leave us, Ruthie? We can't part with you yet a bit, lassie. What would we do without you?'

'O Joe, no! I don't want to leave you,' replied his sister; 'but—but—I love Dick so much, and—'

'Well, well, Ruthie,' rejoined Joe, 'we can't keep you always; and a better fellow than Dick I couldn't wish you for a husband. So I suppose it will have to be "Yes." But what will the mother say about parting with you, Ruthie?'

'Well, but I've something else to tell you, Joe,' said Ruth. 'You know their lease is up at Candlemas, and Dalehead is not big enough for both Dick and Tom, so Tom is going to take it on again by himself, and Dick is going to try to get Riggfield. So, if he does, it won't be like going away at all, hardly; *will it, Joe?*'

As Riggfield was only about a quarter of a mile from Knowecroft, Joe had to acknowledge that there was a saving clause in this arrangement; and as he was on intimate terms with its proprietor, he thought there were good hopes of Dick's being able to secure it.

By this time Blossom had brought them close to their own gate, where Mrs Martindale, who had heard the sound of wheels, was waiting to receive them, having been in a fidget for hours at their non-arrival. And before they went to bed, the matter of Ruth's engagement was broached to her mother, and sufficiently advanced to leave little doubt that when Dick came on Saturday, his answer would not be 'No.'

### III.

All next day, while Joe was going about his work in the harvest-field, the vision of a plump and pretty dairymaid, attired in pink, haunted his brain, and pertinaciously refused to be driven away. Then he found himself repeating her name—'Phyllis, Phyllis—Phyllis May; nice name, Phyllis; just seems to suit her too.' And thereupon he began humming to himself the ditty, *Phyllis is my only joy!* which from thenceforward Joe declared to be the sweetest song in the English language.

'Heigh-ho!' thought he; 'I shall likely never see her again; and even if I did—Come, Joe, lad! this will never do; a pretty farmer's wife an actress would make; and what would the mother say?' Which was all very well in its way; but when the vision of a pretty woman takes possession of a young fellow's heart at five-and-twenty, it is not to be exorcised in that fashion.

Saturday came, and with it arrived Dick, a burly, good-natured young farmer; intelligent enough too, but one who found the 'Stock-book' a great deal more to his taste than either Milton or Shakespeare. But to little Ruth he was as a demi-god; for had he not been enshrined in her heart for two long years, ever since she paid a long visit to his sisters on her leaving school? And as both Mrs Martindale and Joe looked with favourable eyes on his suit, Master Dick had a very pleasant time of it that week-end, you may depend upon it. It was a short stay, though, after all; for he had to go back home again on the Monday evening; but before then he had seen the owner of Riggfield and made arrangements to enter upon that, under the circumstances, 'most desirable' farm, at Candlemas, on a fourteen years' lease.

'Why, Dick,' said Ruth, when he returned to report progress, 'by the time the lease is up, I'll be quite an old woman!'

'Nay, Ruthie, lass,' rejoined Dick; 'it will be time to talk like that when three such leases are up.'

Joe drove Dick to Carlisle, and prayed that Blossom might fall lame or take some temporary ailment that would afford him an excuse to stay later in the town, and so give him another opportunity of seeing his fair enslaver; but no such good-luck fell to his lot, and he had to take his way homeward long before the hour at which the theatre opened. And as this was 'positively the last week' of their performance in Carlisle,

he quite made up his mind that he should never look upon her again. But on the Friday, an event happened at Linthwaite which roused that drowsy hamlet from its normal torpor, and it came about in this wise. About four o'clock in the afternoon, while Joe was overlooking the harvesters in one of his fields that lay a short distance from Knowecroft, in an angle where two roads met, he heard the clatter down the main road of a runaway horse and cart. He made a rush for the corner of the field, in the hope of being able to stop the runaway, and leaping the gate, was just in time to see the horse turn into the byroad at full speed. His heart gave a sudden bound, for between him and the excited animal stood, in the middle of the road, and apparently paralysed with fear, a young lady in a pink dress. Now, in Joe's mind for the past week, the conjunction of a young lady and a pink dress had been suggestive of one thought only—of the adorable Phyllis; and now he felt assured that it was she who was going to be killed before his very eyes. The bare idea of this gave him the speed of an athlete and the strength of a madman, and he tore down the road like one possessed. But he was too late to save her, for before he could grasp the bridle, she had been struck down senseless; and he was just in time, by exerting all his force, to twist the animal round and prevent the wheel of the cart from passing over her helpless form.

The men from the harvest-field were by this time running with all speed to the scene of the accident, and to one of them Joe turned over the care of the frightened horse, while he stooped over its victim, to see how much she had suffered from the blow. And it was Miss Phyllis May! Her eyes were closed, and her cheeks were pallid as death; but Joe could detect the flicker of a pulse in her slender wrist, and lifting her in his arms, he carried her into the house. It was only a couple of minutes' walk, but what minutes they were to Joe—alike blissful and terrible. Her dainty head lay on his shoulder, and the light autumn breeze blew stray tresses of her bright brown hair against his cheek. To clasp her thus was ecstasy; but the fear lest those pale eyelids, white as twin snowdrops, should never more uncloset in life, was agonising.

Mrs Martindale attended poor Phyllis with motherly anxiety; and as soon as Joe had borne the injured girl up to Ruth's bedroom, he left her to the care of his mother and sister, and saddling his best horse, rode off at full speed for the country-side doctor, who lived some three miles away. Fortunately, he found that gentleman at home, with his sturdy cob standing at the door, ready to carry him on a distant visit; so they were enabled to reach Knowecroft without delay. Meanwhile, the patient had been placed in bed, where notwithstanding all Mrs Martindale's rustic appliances, she still lay unconscious. But as the doctor entered the room a feeble moan was heard, and the injured girl began to move about, as though in pain. The kind-hearted old doctor, after carefully examining her condition, gave instructions as to her treatment—above all things enjoining perfect quiet—and assured them that there was no cause for alarm; for although she was suffering from concussion of the brain, it was only slight. He, however,

said that he would call again in a few hours, on his way back from visiting some patients at a distance, and then took his departure.

Long before this time, the party in whose company Miss May had come to Linthwaite had arrived at Knowecroft in a state of great alarm, having heard of her accident. It appeared that Mr Nelson, the principal of the dramatic company to which she was attached, had taken his wife and Miss May for a drive from Carlisle round by Linthwaite; and shortly before reaching that place, their horse had cast a shoe, and they had stopped at the village smithy to have it fastened on. Mrs Nelson had remained seated in the conveyance; but Miss May had taken advantage of the halt to saunter on ahead, and it thus happened that she was alone when the accident occurred. As may be imagined, her friends awaited the result of her examination by the doctor in great trepidation, and it was with a feeling of relief that they heard his report as above mentioned. Having to be in Carlisle for that evening's performance, and as a substitute for 'Phoebe' would have to be got even at the eleventh hour, they could not prolong their stay at Knowecroft; but Mr Nelson promised to drive back as soon as his duties at the theatre were over for the night, to ascertain how Miss May was progressing, and if necessary, to procure additional professional assistance. Dr Graham, however, assured him that this would not be required, and that, although the recovery of his fair patient might be slow, he had every confidence that she was not in a dangerous condition.

Joe was overjoyed at this declaration, and was almost wicked enough to feel that this accident, which might have been fraught with such serious consequences to one who had been in all his thoughts for a whole week, was a most happy one for him. He would allow no one but himself to go to Dr Graham's for some drugs which that gentleman wished to have in readiness in case they should be required; and all the way going and returning he was drawing in his mind roseate pictures of what might be the result of this fortunate meeting with the maiden of his dreams.

The doctor came back according to promise, and found all going on quite satisfactorily. Mr Nelson also returned about midnight, and before taking his leave, said that his professional engagements necessitated his going to Edinburgh on the following day, and would keep him there for at least a week; but he instructed Joe that no expense was to be spared in hastening the recovery of Miss May, who was, he said, much more to him than a mere member of his company, for she was the daughter of a very dear friend, long since dead.

To which Joe replied: 'Mr Nelson, Miss May is my guest, and no one but myself shall spend one shilling on her behalf while she is in my house. And I shall see that nothing is wanting that will be for her good.'

'Mr Martindale,' rejoined the other, 'you are a good fellow. God bless you for it! I leave my friend in your care with the utmost confidence; and whatever you may do for her, I am sure you will never regret. She is not like one of our set. But I must be off, for my wife will

be worrying herself to death till I get back with news how Phyllis is going on.' And shaking hands heartily with Joe, the worthy manager set out once more for Carlisle.

TO THE POINT.

'CAN you fight?' shouted the charity boy through the keyhole. 'No, sir,' replied Oliver Twist meekly, from the other side of the door. 'Then I'll whop you' was Mr Noah Claypole's prompt rejoinder. This was to the point with a vengeance, and there are many rejoinders worth chronicling equally prompt, if not so bellicose.

A man took a seat in a barber's chair. He asked the barber if he had the same razor he had used the day before. Being answered in the affirmative, the patient man said: 'Then give me chloroform.' That was one to the customer, just as the next is one to the barber. An English gentleman, somewhat bald, entered a hairdresser's in Paris to be operated upon, and was thunderstruck to find himself charged ten francs. 'Ten francs!' he exclaimed, 'for cutting my hair!'—'O no, monsieur; not for cutting your hair, but for finding the hair to cut.'

There is a story of a gentleman when advocating the utility of public schools saying: 'Byron was a Harrow boy.'—'What of that?' said an opponent; 'Burns was a ploughboy.' Equally neat and ready was the woman's answer to an inquirer, who, seeing 'This cottage for sail' painted on a board, politely asked woman in front of the house when the cottage was to sail. 'Just as soon as the man comes who can raise the wind,' was her quick reply.

A shabbily dressed woman called upon a gentleman for aid, claiming that she was in a starving condition. He looked upon her plethoric form, estimating the avoirdupois of the superfluous fat, and answered: 'You don't look like a starving woman.'—'I know it,' she whiningly answered; 'I'm bloated with grief.'

A railroad engineer saying that the usual life of a locomotive was only thirty years, a passenger remarked that such a tough-looking thing ought to live longer than that. 'Well,' responded the engineer, 'perhaps it would, if it didn't smoke so much.'

'I think I'll get out and stretch my legs a little,' said a tall man, as the train stopped at a station. 'Oh, don't!' said a passenger who had been sitting opposite to him, and who had been much embarrassed by the legs of his tall companion—'don't do that! They are too long already!' A fast youth asked at a city restaurant: 'What have you got?' 'Almost everything, sir,' was the reply.—'Well, give me a plate of that.' 'Yes 'ir.—Hash!' shouted the waiter down the speaking-tube.

More good-natured and quite as much to the point is the following. A man was hurrying along the street the other night, when another man, also in violent haste, rushed out of an alley, and the two collided with great force. The second man looked mad; while the polite man, taking off his hat, said: 'My dear sir, I don't know which of us is to blame for this violent encounter, but I am in too great a hurry to investigate. If I ran into you, I beg your pardon;

if you ran into me, don't mention it ;' and he tore away at redoubled speed.

Well matched in politeness and readiness was a gentleman whose button caught hold of the fringe on a lady's shawl. 'I'm attached to you,' said the gentleman, laughing, while he was industriously trying to get loose. 'The attachment is mutual,' was the good-natured reply.

Woman's wit was not badly illustrated when an idle fop said to a lady : 'My dear Miss Smith, why did you not take advantage of leap-year to get married?'—'Because I am not able to earn enough to support a husband,' was the unexpected answer. Equally ready was a young miss to whom her sweetheart said : 'You are such a strange girl, that really I don't know what to make of you?'—'Well, then, I'll tell you, Charlie,' she replied—'make a wife of me.' It is satisfactory to add that he did so at the earliest opportunity.

Two young married French ladies were talking about their husbands. Said one of them : 'Do you really think your Jules went shooting yesterday?'—'Well, I don't think he tried to deceive me yesterday; I'm inclined to think he went.'—'But he didn't bring back any game?'—'That's what makes me feel sure he did go!' was the wife's reply.

As ready, but more spiteful, was the answer to a crusty old fellow, who once asked : 'What is the reason that griffins, dragons, and demons are ladies' favourite subjects for embroidery designs?'—'Oh, because they are continually thinking of their husbands,' was the lady's quick retort.

More pointed than polite is the following strange receipt for conjugal harmony. Concerning a couple well known for their outward and visible mutual affection, it was asked by a neighbour : 'Why is she so fond of her husband?'—'Because he is perfectly unintelligible.'—'And why does he adore her?'—'Because she is almost a little idiot.'

A lady once remarked to a clever actor who had a broken nose : 'I like your acting, sir; but, to be frank with you, I can't get over your nose.'—'No wonder, madam,' replied he ; 'the bridge is gone.' Equally ready was another actor whose benefit resulted in a very thin house. The actress in the scene with him speaking very low in her communications with her lover, he exclaimed with woful humour : 'My dear, you may speak out; there is nobody to hear us.' It is related that at the opera in Dublin, a gentleman sarcastically asked a man standing up in front of him if he was aware he was opaque. The other denied the allegation, and said he was O'Brien.

The natural readiness of the Irish is well shown in an argument between a Saxon and a Celt respecting the nationality of various great men who had lived and died. The Irishman had successively claimed each one mentioned as a countryman of his own, till at length the Englishman, somewhat nettled, inquired : 'How about Shakspeare—was he an Irishman?' to which he received the reply : 'Well, I can't say exactly, but at all events he had the abilities of one.' A German paper tells a story of a certain general whose servant was in the habit of getting intoxicated. 'Jacques,' at last said his master

to him, 'I shall have to send you about your business; I hear dreadful tales of your goings-on.'—'Ah, general,' replied Jacques, quite unabashed, 'if I believed all the bad things people say about you, I should have gone away myself long ago.'

For calm presence of mind in the way of answer, the following deserves a foremost place. 'Do you drink?' said a temperance reformer to a beggar who had implored alms of him. 'Yes, thank you, sir,' returned the candid pauper ; 'where shall we go?'

'What are you going to do when you grow up, if you don't know how to read, write, and cipher?' asked a school-teacher of a lazy, stupid boy, who replied : 'I'm going to be a schoolmaster, an' make the boys do all the readin', writin', and cipherin'.' A small boy who is one of a family of ten children was taken out for a drive with his mother. As they drove past a small cottage of two rooms, Johnnie called his mother's attention to it, who remarked that it was a very small house. 'Yes,' replied Johnnie meditatively, 'it's small; but it would be plenty big enough for our family if it wasn't for you and the children.'

This was matched in readiness by a lad who applied to the captain of a vessel for a berth. The captain, wishing to intimidate him, handed him a piece of rope and said : 'If you want to make a good sailor, you must make three ends of the rope.'—'I can do it,' he readily replied. 'Here is one, and here is another—that makes two. Now, here's the third,' and he threw it overboard.

'Don't you find it hurts your lawn to let your children play upon it?' asked a friend of a suburban the other day. 'Yes,' answered the gentleman addressed ; 'but it doesn't hurt the children.'

'Are you lost, my little fellow?' asked a gentleman of a four-year old one day. 'No,' he sobbed in reply ; 'but my mother is.'—'And how does Charlie like going to school?' kindly inquired a good man of a juvenile who was waiting with a tin can in his hand the advent of companion. 'I like goin' well enough,' he replied ; 'but I don't like staying after I get there.'

Quite as ingenuous as ingenuous was the answer of a boy who was kept after school for bad orthography, and excused himself to his parents by saying that he was spell-bound.—'What shall I talk to you about?' said a clergyman to some school-children. 'About ten minutes,' exclaimed a young girl.

'Here's your money, dolt!' cried an angry debtor. 'Now tell me why your master wrote eighteen letters about that paltry sum?'—'I am sure I can't tell, sir,' said the shopboy ; 'but I think it was because seventeen letters didn't fetch it.'

'Don't you know it is very wrong to smoke, my boy?' said an old lady to a youngster who persisted in puffing a cheap cigar. 'Oh, I smoke for my health,' answered the boy saucily. —'But you never heard of a cure by smoking,' she continued presently. 'O yes, I did,' persisted the boy, blowing a big cloud ; 'that's the way they cure pigs.'—'Smoke on, then,' quickly replied the old lady ; 'there's some hope for you yet.'

An American strolled into a fashionable church just before the service began. The sexton followed him up, and tapping him on the shoulder, and pointing to a small cur that had followed him into the sacred edifice, said: 'Dogs are not admitted.' 'That's not my dog,' replied the visitor. 'But he follows you.' 'Well, so do you.' The sexton growled, and removed the dog with unnecessary violence.

'That sermon did me good,' said one friend to another, after hearing an eloquent preacher. 'We shall see,' was the reply.

A melting sermon being preached in a country church, all were affected except one man, who was asked why he did not weep with the rest. 'Oh,' said he, 'I belong to another parish.'

Student reciting: 'And—er—then he—er—went—er—and—er'—The class laugh. Professor: 'Don't laugh, gentlemen; to err is human.'

'Is it a sin,' asked a fashionable lady of her spiritual director, 'for me to feel pleasure when a gentleman says I am handsome?' 'It is, my daughter,' he replied gravely; 'we should never delight in falsehood.' 'Doctor,' said a gentleman to his clergyman, 'how can I best train my boy in the way he should go?' 'By going that way yourself,' was the unexpected reply.

Being asked how he liked the performance of a certain Dramatic Club, an auditor replied that he should 'hardly call it a club, but rather a collection of sticks.'

The foregoing are severe enough, but for concentrated spite must yield the palm to the one with which we conclude. An impecunious fortune-hunter had been accepted by an heiress. At the wedding, when that portion of the ceremony was reached where the bridegroom says, 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow,' a spiteful relative of the bride exclaimed: 'There goes his valise!'

#### CANINE AFFECTION IN CEYLON.

A YOUNG Englishman, while acting as superintendent of an extensive tea-plantation in the interior of Ceylon, possessed a varied collection of dogs, native and foreign; amongst his chief favourites and most constant companions being numbered a large female specimen, somewhat resembling in appearance the English bulldog. One of the puppies reared by her had been given away to a coolie, living on a remote division of the estate, locally known as 'The Coolie Lines,' situated at a distance of two or three miles.

For some little time afterwards nothing in particular was remarked with regard to its bereaved parent's conduct, beyond natural grief at such a separation. Subsequently, a daily habit of unaccountably absenting herself from home for consecutive hours gradually attracted her owner's notice, more especially as these mysterious disappearances seemed always to occur at precisely the same portion of each morning and evening. Diligent search was therefore made about the immediate neighbourhood of her master's bungalow, yet without any satisfactory result being attained, the absentee continuing to vanish as before. Towards noon, and again on the approach of night, the animal, still,

invariably returned, having evidently during the interim endured no trifling degree of fatigue in some active pursuit. Under these circumstances, a trustworthy servant was set to watch her movements more closely, with strict orders to follow—unobserved as far as practicable—whithersoever the wanderer's footsteps might lead. A striking instance of more than ordinary maternal devotion was brought to light, combined with reflective powers of intellect much beyond what can be expressed, merely, by the conventional term 'instinct.'

Shortly after the usual breakfast of rice had been supplied to the dogs collectively, on the ensuing morning, a start was made by the single servant and his charge for the new home of the puppy. The messenger then ascertained from the resident coolies that not only did their popular visitor arrive regularly every morning and evening to enjoy a fleeting interview with the young dog, where it was chained, but, in addition, as much rice as could possibly be conveyed in her mouth was brought there on each occasion to be laid down before the gratified puppy! An offering clearly reserved from her own allowance of breakfast and supper, for that truly laudable purpose. This slight repast, supplied at the cost of so much exertion and solicitude, being concluded, to the visible contentment of both parties concerned, and, after allowing herself only such a brief period of reward or repose, the loving creature set out on her homeward journey. Surely she carried therein a cheering consciousness of having, to the utmost verge of a limited ability, done her duty in that state of life unto which she had been called.

The above simple story is no oriental romance, but a plain fact, resting on unquestionable authority. It will, indeed, only appear incredible to those persons who, through being unfamiliar with our dumb fellow-pilgrims, are unable even to comprehend, still less to appreciate, their capabilities of reason and affection.

#### A NEW EXPLOSIVE.

THE consignment to Egypt of a quantity of blasting-gelatine, to aid in the removal of rocks and boulders which obstructed the passage of the Nile expedition, calls attention to a new material, at once the most recent and the most powerful explosive yet introduced.

In outline, the manufacture and composition of this new explosive will be readily understood. Nitro-cotton, finely divided, is added to nitro-glycerine, heated in a copper vessel; the mixture—which consists of seven parts of the former material to ninety-three of the latter—is then well stirred, and ultimately acquires a viscous consistency, which on cooling, stiffens, and becomes semi-transparent. Notwithstanding the fact that blasting-gelatine is a safer explosive than either nitro-glycerine or dynamite, the process is both difficult and dangerous, and requires special precautions; for should the nitro-glycerine which enters into its composition be raised to too high a temperature, an explosion will in all probability ensue. Blasting-gelatine, like its principal ingredient, nitro-glycerine, readily freezes, but, unlike that substance, appears to become more explosive when congealed.

Turning now to the properties of the new material under consideration: it may be noted that the employment of dynamite is decreasing in favour of blasting-gelatine, whose suitability for mining and other kindred purposes is amply demonstrated by the successful manner in which it scatters the mass surrounding the boreholes in which it is placed. Insoluble in water, and uninjured by months of submersion, this new rival to dynamite—a material notoriously unsuited for such work—possesses a property essentially valuable, and which cannot fail to secure its adoption on an extended scale in all places where it becomes necessary to resort to subaqueous blasting. It will be no matter of surprise that attempts have recently been made to utilise so powerful and effective an explosive in shells; but these experiments, owing to the extreme sensibility of the gelatine, have not as yet realised the expectations formed of them.

Some interesting experiments, having for their object the determination of the relative blasting power of various explosives, give the following results: If the blasting power of gunpowder be represented by 1, that of gun-cotton will be represented by  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ; dynamite by 2 to  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , according to composition; nitro-glycerine by  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ; and blasting-gelatine by  $5\frac{1}{2}$ . The present cost of blasting-gelatine exceeds that of dynamite, a fact, however, more than counterbalanced by the increased safety and handiness of the former, in addition to its valuable suitability for subaqueous work.

There can be but little doubt that as dynamite supersedes nitro-glycerine, so dynamite in its turn must largely give place to blasting-gelatine, and that this new compound is destined to figure largely in the future history of the explosives of commerce.

#### TO AN ENGLISH GIRL

BY ALEXANDER ANDERSON.

You smile, and half in jest you ask  
A song from me. A simple task,  
If he who sings had all the youth  
And freshness of thy maiden truth,  
To give to words the glow and light,  
Without which who can sing aright?  
But other years than those which make  
Thy brow a splendour for thy sake,  
Are mine, and at their touch I feel  
A certain sadness upward steal,  
That whispers, only heard by me:  
'He must be young who sings to thee.'

You answer: 'It is said or sung  
That poets must be always young—  
That unto them the years pass by,  
And leave no shade on brow or eye—  
That youth still keeps its summer day,  
And age is ever far away.'  
Alan! a sage\* has said, who dwelt  
Where beauty like a sun is felt,  
That poets start this life in gladness,  
But in the end there cometh madness.  
Sad truth; for when we journey on,  
The golden mists of fancy gone,  
Which, fools of our own dreams, we threw  
O'er all that came within our view,  
We catch, with sadness in our eye,  
Dull hills beneath a duller sky.

\* Wordsworth.

And miss the light that came and went  
Like music o'er an instrument.  
Enough! No threnody from me;  
No sorrow when I sing to thee.

But what to say or sing? In sooth,  
My muse must be thy blooming youth,  
And that fair face and cheeks, whereon  
Love has his sweetest roses thrown,  
And touched with dainty finger-tips  
The dewy crimson of thy lips,  
And set in light, with half a sigh,  
His own sweet language in thine eye—  
This must my inspiration be,  
Or how else could I sing to thee?

I dream, and dreaming, place thy feet  
In woodland paths when spring is sweet,  
Where in the silence scarcely stirred,  
The bursting of the leaves is heard,  
And like a murmur through the air  
The new life throbs, and all is fair.  
Or better, on an afternoon  
In some rich English lane in June,  
With all the hedge on either side  
Aglow with roses in their pride;  
The winds of summer in thy hair,  
As loth to wander otherwhere;  
And overhead a sky serene,  
Where not a single cloud is seen;  
And humming as you trip along  
Stray snatches of an English song,  
Of lovers talking as they pass  
Through meadows thick with springing grass,  
Or plighting love-truth at the stile,  
And I to see thee all the while,  
Deeming thy voice—ah, who would not?—  
The fairy echo of the spot.

This, this, were sweeter for your prime,  
An English lane in summer-time,  
Than this cold city, where the dust  
Of streets corrodes and eats like rust;  
Where life roars on, and pulses beat  
With throbbing blood at fever-heat,  
And all the weary waves we see  
Of this strange, sad humanity,  
Flow and re-flow without a pause,  
Like tidal-breaths that ocean draws,  
Till weary of such yearning quest,  
They moan at midnight into rest.

Ah, wherefore ask a song from me,  
As if it could be bought to thee?  
For sweeter far than verse, is all  
Thy young heart's happy madrigal,  
Which, sung to thee when all is still  
And fancy wanders at her will,  
Wafts thee, as light as clouds are blown,  
To that fair realm where dreams alone  
May enter, and where, low and clear,  
Love with his lips against thine ear  
Whispers those words, that said or sung,  
Remould this world, and make it young,  
Till fields and woods, and seas and skies  
Draw back the light of Paradise,  
And in its sunshine thou dost stand,  
Full maiden in a maiden's land,  
And on thy brow, as horoscope,  
The golden aureole of hope.

Ah! wherefore ask a song from me?  
He must be young who sings to thee.

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